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Our Faith

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Purpose: To preserve and strengthen the Christian essence of Unitarianism

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Prayer For A Funeral

RUTH W. LYMAN

Dear Father in heaven, who sent thy son into the world to teach us love for one another, look down upon us at this hour, for our hearts are still and listening for the coming of thy grace and comfort.

Lord, as we gather together to remember the dead and ask thy blessing upon the living, wilt thou make us feel near one another in this place, and still near the life thou hast taken away to dwell with thee in heaven.

O Lord, we come before thy mystery of life and death with reverent hearts, understanding not all its meaning, but trusting thee always as the wise father, revealing good from generation to generation.

Dear God, we thank thee that we can come together in remembrance of days and hours we have shared; we thank thee for whatsoever helpfulness; great or small, we have either given or received. As our hearts overflow today with loving thoughts of the friend who has passed from our sight, we remember to thank thee for the life lived as one of thy messengers.

And now, O loving God, who dost not afflict the hearts of thy children except thou show them the way of comfort and trust in thee, wilt thou sanctify the sorrow of parting until we feel underneath both life and death the strength of thine everlasting arms. Amen.

Christianity and Other Religions

Is Christianity but one religion among others equally good? This question was the theme of the World Religions Section at the Thirteenth Congress of the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom (Amsterdam, July 19-25, 1949).

After much discussion the following statement was formulated by the World Religions Section and received by the Congress:

"The group states that in our attitude to other religions we must without reservation of any kind acknowledge what is true and good in them. Our approach to them should be one of reverence for the convictions and teachings of them without idealizing them.

"We believe that the real problems of life, social and other, are common to all human beings the world over.

"We believe there are revelations of God in other religions, but the Christian Gospel has for us a decisive and supreme character.

"In the midst of outward unity effected by the developments of modern science we see diversity in religion. But we believe that this diversity has its roots in the will of God revealing himself at different times, under different circumstances and in different ways.

"Within this diversity, as Christians, we have our place to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ made manifest in his living, his preaching, and his death. If we compare Christianity with the other religions, we discover the distinctive message of it is the message of love. But this message of love has to be believed and acted upon for it to succeed in the world.

"On this basis Liberal Christianity has a world task. The masses have turned away from religion because of dissatisfaction with the traditional forms of Christianity. Herein lies the opportunity for the I. A. R. F. Today the idea of Revolution goes hand in hand with the idea of dictatorship, in the form of Fascism, Bolshevism, and political Catholicism. The world faces the alternative since man possesses free will and has the responsibility of making a choice between the forces of evil and the forces of good leading to spiritual unity. Therefore all of us must be missionaries on a world scale for Liberal Christianity.

"We must preach our distinctive message of belief in God in the spirit of freedom, believing that although there is a unity of the spirit underlying all the religions of the world, the Christian message of love is the vital need of

the world today for establishing on earth the kingdom of God.

"We must cooperate with other religions to fight the common enemies of religion in this steadily growing irreligious age, to fight the growing materialism of the peoples of the world, to fight excessive nationalism and fatalism, to fight indifference and passivity, and bigoted intolerance.

"Unless we unite to fight these enemies, the world will become completely secular, the standards of morality will be lowered and evil will triumph over the powers of goodness, but we believe that God will help His children to make His will overcome all evil."

U.C.F. President Addresses Conference

Sybil H. Holmes, Recorder of the Massachusetts Land Court and President of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship, gave an inspiring address at a recent meeting of the Plymouth and Bay Conference of Unitarian Churches.

She expressed her indebtedness to the Unitarian ministers and Sunday School teachers who had encouraged her, at an early age, towards a spiritual faith with which to face the great journey of life, a faith which led her to a greater Power than man to Whom to turn in the crises of life.

"It is important that we worship God," she said, "and believe in the leadership of Jesus, and never fail to stress the emphasis we feel to be true. We must also be tolerant of the person whose point of view is different from our own." Each Unitarian should be a missionary saying what he stands for and believes. "Life is a growth and new ideas are helpful, but those who have a firm conviction of the reality of a spiritual faith, tested in their experience, will never surrender it for any lesser things."

Our Dual Mission

EDWARD L. SHEPPARD
(Student, Meadville Theological School, Chicago)

The inroads made by Humanism on Unitarian thinking have a value. Since "religious liberalism" is no longer the unique property of any denomination, but has spread into the greater part of thinking Protestantism, our church must re-evaluate its nature and its heritage. And "scientific Humanism" is rapidly forcing this task upon us. Humanism, as a methodology which has mistaken itself for a creed, is not to be dismissed by an anathema, but to be soberly considered, analyzed into its components, evaluated, and criticized accordingly.

Throughout the history of the Unitarian church, our fellowship has had a dual mission. Its greater mission is, and always will be, to furnish a spiritual environment in which the seeker can find guidance, inspiration, and an orientation to the greater unseen world about us. Its lesser mission is to convey the spirit of the radical Protestantism which preceded Luther, which shall outlast Humanism, and which is rooted in the spirituality of the individual.

Naturalistic Humanism, in renouncing the theistic basis of religion, has not given any creative, heroic meaning to the individual religious seeker. In it is implicit the dangerous tendency to evaluate conduct and thought in terms of the immediate antecedent and consequent, without any sense of "whence and whither." It is an ethic of expediency, and a rule of safety, and a fragmentary purpose. Whitehead has given us a keen estimate of this tendency: "Evil is the brute motive force of fragmentary purpose, disregarding the eternal vision. The power of God is the worship he inspires. . . . The worship of God is not a rule of safety — it is an adventure of the Spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure."

The issue of the moment, our lesser mission, is not negation, but affirmation. The controversy between unitarian and trinitarian, between science and religion, and between the Bible and evolution are all exploded issues resolved by sober thought and research. The insistence on empirical verification of an intuitive reality, the issue raised by the Humanist, can be exploded by the same sober thought. The strategy for settling this issue is the formulation of a truly broad-church ideal in which the inwardness of the religious spirit can be made explicit in the face of the ponderous systems, inescapable and collective, of theological neo-orthodoxy.

New Fiction

A man who has time to read but one novel a month at most is hardly in a position to say with authority that the last two novels he has read represent a new trend in contemporary fiction. But if they do, it is something to be thankful for.

The Stumbling Stone by Aubrey Menen (Scribner) is a satire on welfarists whose "helpfulness" to others, or rather to their "cases," is primarily a method of self-help. The psychiatrist, the welfare enthusiast, the Visitor, the man whose hobby — bad boys — puts him on five government committees, all these and others are the victims of the author's wit and give his readers many a chuckle. Yet, as in satire at its best, the aim is serious, and it turns out that the only person who could do the delinquent Charlie any good was a "stupid old woman" who did what she did just "for the love of God."

The Big Wheel by John Brooks (Harper) is a character study of the editor-in-chief of a fabulously successful weekly magazine. The question posed by the plot is a living one: Does an employee sell his soul to his employer, especially when the employer is an editor and the employee is a writer, or when the employer is a publisher and the employee is an editor? The answer given is that he must do so — that is, if he wishes to reach the top and stay there. The story has elements of power, and its author is definitely promising.

R. G.-S.

Letter from the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the American Unitarian Association to the Chairman of the U.C.F.

The October issue of Our Faith contained an editorial entitled "George Davis Becomes Treasurer." Inasmuch as the writer obviously misunderstood and misinterpreted the circumstances under which Mr. Davis came to be appointed Treasurer and by this misinterpretation has cast serious reflections on many individual Unitarians, I am, by vote of the Board of Directors of the A. U. A., giving you the facts and requesting that you find space for this letter in an early issue of Our Faith.

A new treasurer was to be elected at the May meetings in 1949. Customarily the Board of Directors of the Association nominates a candidate in time for the publication of the nomination in the *Christian Register* ninety days before the time of election. In this case the Board did not act in time and a committee was appointed to find a prominent Unitarian competent in the financial field who would allow his name to be put in nomination by petition required to be filed sixty days before election.

Although the committee and individuals worked diligently in search of a candidate, they were not successful up to a short time before the petition had to be filed. To avoid a blank on the ballot and probable confusion if the matter was left for nomination from the floor in the May meeting, Charles S. Bolster was persuaded to allow his name to go on the petition on the condition that he be permitted to resign as soon as possible after the May meeting by which time it was expected that a suitable person would be available for selection by the Board of Directors. Mr. Bolster's name was duly filed. The ballot distributed to all delegates by mail and otherwise contained the statement "At the request of this nominee (Mr. Bolster), it should be stated that his nomination or election is only until another candidate can be found to fill the office."

Sixty days passed and the annual meeting was at hand, and still no suitable candidate was in sight for the Board of Directors to act on. At this point Mr. Bolster suggested that George Davis, about to retire as Director of Church Extension, and a thoroughly competent man for Treasurer, might be willing to step into the breach for a year during which time a permanent treasurer of the type originally contemplated could be sought. Mr. Davis consented to allow his name to go before the Board of Directors with the understanding that he was not committing himself for more than one year. Charles Bolster was elected at the Annual Meeting, then resigned so that the new Board of Directors could elect George Davis.

It takes a lively imagination or a jaundiced eye — let's call it imagination — to make out of this a deliberate plot on the part of Charles Bolster and the Board of Directors to manipulate the election of a treasurer in order to placate the Humanists who might otherwise secede from the denomination — for that is precisely what the editorial charges. It is insulting to Mr. Bolster and to the Board of Directors. For the organ of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship to make such a charge is not Christian and it certainly does not promote Fellowship.

If criticism of our denominational activities and policies is a major function of Our Faith as it appears to be, this criticism should be related to facts. That is not so in this case. A sense of fairness will undoubtedly impel the Fellowship to acknowledge that the editor has here overstepped the bounds and, for the sake of our denomination and the reputation of the Fellowship, should make amends by publishing

this letter in full and with it some expression of regret.

Yours for a finer Fellowship,
LAWRENCE G. BROOKS

By What Authority?

HARVEY SWANSON
(Minister, Lancaster and Harrisburg, Pa.)

The American Unitarian Association has given wide publicity to a new statement of what Unitarians stand for. It is the statement that was prepared by the chief executive officer of the A. U. A. , and was given by him in his address to the A. U. A.'s Annual Meeting last May.

To preface his statement of the Unitarian position, he said, "Many people seem confused as to what Unitarianism stands for today. Well, I can tell you what Unitarianism stands for."

The statement that followed said: "We stand for Religion . . . for Liberty . . . for Reason . . . for the Ethics of Jesus . . . for Individual Responsibility."

The question this sort of thing raises is, By what authority does the chief executive of our Unitarian Association assume the right to issue unauthorized statements defining our Unitarianism?

With regard to the particular statement mentioned, I certainly endorse all of it myself, as will almost all Unitarians. It was a good statement so far as it went. But that is not the point. The point is that the statement was that of Dr. Eliot's own position. It was a purely individual statement, yet it was offered as a statement of what Unitarianism stands for.

When so offered, it becomes important for what it leaves out. It leaves out all reference to God, and all reference to the *religion* of Jesus. So we are faced with an official of the A. U. A. giving out a statement of what we stand for which in important respects overlooks the statement of our Purpose in the By-Laws.

So this raises a further question. Not only by what authority does an executive official issue any statement for all of us which we have not agreed to, but also by what authority are important things in our official Purpose left out in such a statement? By what authority does an elected official repeal the statement of Purpose under which he was elected to office, and to which his whole efforts are supposed to be devoted? Is there no responsibility resting upon the elected officers of the A.U.A. to fulfill the official Purpose of the Association?

Is it not an alarming situation when our officials can openly flout the statement of Purpose which it is their moral responsibility to defend?

Croce and Christianity

(The following is from a chapter entitled "Why We Cannot Help Calling Ourselves Christians" in Benedetto Croce's new book, *My Philosophy*, published by Allen & Unwin.)

"The rise of Christianity was the greatest revolution that the human race has ever accomplished.

"It is not surprising that something so great, so wide and so deep, so far-reaching in its effects, so unforeseen and so irresistible in its development, should have been thought, and might still be thought, a miracle, a revelation from on high, a direct intervention of God in human affairs, giving them new laws and setting them on an entirely new path.

"No other revolutions will bear comparison with this; even the great discoveries which mark epochs in human history beside it seem incidental and limited. There are no exceptions: not the revolution of the Greeks in poetry, art, philosophy and civil liberty, nor that of the Romans in law, not to speak of writing, mathematics, medicine and the other more ancient discoveries which we owe to Egypt and the East. And though the revolutions and discoveries which have followed in modern times were not so incidental and limited as their ancient predecessors, but touched the whole man in his very soul, they can only be conceived as dependent on the Christian revolution and derivative from its original and lasting stimulus. . . .

"Pre-Christian men, heroes and men of genius, did marvelous deeds, created magnificent art, and handed down to us rich treasures of style, of thought and experience; but in all of them we find wanting that authentic touch of brotherhood in one communion which Christianity alone has given to human life."

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